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What the pope really said

Phyllis Zagano | Sep. 25, 2013 Just Catholic

America magazine skipped part of Pope Francis' interview about women. Read the Italian. Or the French. Or the Spanish. Or the news reports in any language other than English.

No kidding. Two sentences crucial to understanding Pope Francis' views on women in the church fell off the desks of the four men and one woman who translated the interview for the Jesuit journal published in New York. Either that, or the *America* editors cut out parts of that crucial paragraph.

These are the sentences from the interview in Italian [1]:

> In una intervista aveva affermato che la presenza femminile nella Chiesa non è emersa più di tanto, perché la tentazione del maschilismo non ha lasciato spazio per rendere visibile il ruolo che spetta alle donne nella comunità ... ."È necessario ampliare gli spazi di una presenza femminile più incisiva nella Chiesa."

The first sentence is commentary by Fr. Antonio Spadaro, the Jesuit editor of *La Civilità Cattolica*, who conducted the interviews over three days in August. The second sentence is a direct quote from Francis, a quote present in the French, Spanish and quite probably in the other translations among the total 16 Jesuit publications that ran the interview.

What was lost in the English translation has been found. The Italian editor wrote about Francis: "In an interview he had affirmed that the feminine presence in the Church has not fully emerged, because the temptation of machismo has not left space to make visible the role women are entitled to within the community."

After speaking of his idea for a "theology of women," Francis said: "It is necessary to widen the space for more incisive feminine presence in the church."

Interpret the meaning of his words as you will. That is what the pope really said. I cannot understand how it got past all those smart folks at *America* and their small tribe of translators. I think it is important.

Here's why.

There are two points here. First, Pope Francis turns the Italian expression "*non c'è spazio qui*" ("there's no room here") on its head, stating quite plainly that the church must make room -- find space for -- women in its mission. Second, the pope's choice of words is nearly identical to those used by Pope Benedict XVI in 2006. Responding to a young priest during his annual Lenten visit with the priests of Rome that year, Benedict said virtually the same thing, asking, "*Tuttavia, è giusto chiedersi se anche nel servizio ministeriale ... non si possa offrire più spazio, più posizioni di responsabilità alle donne?*" That is: "However, it is proper to ask whether in ministerial service ... can we not offer more space, more positions of responsibility, to women?"

For the record: Deacons are ordained to the ministry, not the priesthood.

Francis' complete comments on women did not go unnoticed outside the English-speaking world. The huge Spanish daily *El Pais* *[2]*even ran a story opining [2] the pope was ready to name women as cardinals, noting that two laymen became cardinals in the 19th century and reminding its readers that the tradition of women ordained as deacons could be restarted at any moment. (Full disclosure: *El Pais* cited my work on women in the diaconate.)

What's going on here? The *America* translators are competent, smart and, for the most part, young. Four seem young enough to be children or even grandchildren of the pope: Massimo Faggioli, an ecclesiologist who teaches at the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota, is a native Italian; Sarah Christopher Faggioli, his wife, is a Ph.D. candidate in Italian literature at the University of Chicago; Jesuit Fr. Dominic Robinson teaches systematic and pastoral theologies at Heythrop College in London; and Griffin Oleynick is a Yale Ph.D. candidate in Italian. The senior member of the team, who is in his 70s and has been a Jesuit for more than 50 years, is Jesuit Fr. Patrick J. Howell, who teaches pastoral theology at Seattle University and, like Robinson, studied in Rome.

They worked hard. They discussed every word. But why did they translate a paragraph about women, omitting the crucial sentences -- from Spadaro and from Pope Francis -- that apply the *machismo* problem to the men of the church and apply the future of women in ministry to the needs of the church?

I want to believe it was an honest mistake. The phone rang. The tea boiled. The pen ran out of ink. Still, it was a big mistake.

The pope complained that what he hears about women is often inspired by an ideology of *machismo*. Maybe *machismo* did not cause the dropped lines -- and change of focus -- at *America*. But nobody noticed it, and with minimal exception, the interview project was all-male, all the time.

Related:
America apologizes for omission in Francis interview [3]

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